forum

DEMOCRATIC left

AUGUST 1995. FREE TO MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS OF DEMOCRATIC LEFT

***PROINSIAS DE ROSSA, Minister for Social Welfare, addressing an 'Alternative Bastille Day' celebration in Dublin organised by DL in protest at renewed French nuclear tests in the Pacific. Also in the photo are Liz McManus, Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal and DL Executive members John De Courcy Ireland (also President of Irish CND) and Sylvie Batt. See report page 6.**

NEXT STEP FORWARD

FOLLOWING the holiday period, Democratic Left will hold a number of planning meetings to discuss policy and strategy. The meetings will both look back at the first half year in government and assess the issues and policy areas which need to be addressed over the Autumn and beyond. Among the main initiatives planned are

* an Autumn School in October,
* an Education Seminar on the recent White Paper in Cork city on Sat. Sept. 9th.
* Regional meetings in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Galway,
* a planning meeting for branches in the 11 Dublin constituencies.

Details of the above will be circulated to members with the next mailing.

HIROSHIMA DAY

Join Proinsias de Rossa and our other TDs and members at the Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the first nuclear bomb in Hiroshima, ***Sunday, August 6th, in Merrion Square, Dublin at 3pm.***

The event is organised by Irish CND.

TELECOM CHANGES

The government has agreed to the sale of one-third of Telecom Eireann as part of a partnership arrangement to provide the best chance of securing the company and jobs. As reported in earlier editions of 'Forum', the company faces international competition which makes survival under its present structure untenable. A price war from international competitors, for instance, would quickly bankrupt the company.

No company has yet been agreed for a partnership arrangement, but they will be required to display a commitment to developing telecommunications and to assist Telecom Eireann to become a major player on the international market, which faces major changes under EU regulations at the end of the decade.

The massive changes in technology, international marketing and pricing structures are beyond Telecom's ability to match. Failure to move now would result in a crisis in a short time, in which financial and employment decisions would be forced in an unplanned manner. The government's decision to enter Telecom into an alliance was taken on this basis.

Three year separation for Divorce, says DL

DEMOCRATIC LEFT believes that a three year separation period should be the requirement in the forthcoming Divorce referendum. Newspaper reports in recent months have suggested a four or even five year requirement might be stipulated, but this would place unnecessary stress on couples whose marriage has broken down, in DL's view.

The party's view on this matter was re-iterated by Proinsias de Rossa following the most recent media coverage. No decision has been taken on the matter by government as yet and the matter will now most likely be finalised in the early Autumn.

Some politicians are urging extreme caution on the basis that too liberal a timeframe might result in defeat of the referendum, which is scheduled to be held in late November of this year. However, there is no evidence that those opposed to divorce will have their views substantially altered by including a longer wait.

The need for a 'yes' vote in the referendum is shown by recent statistics which show that in 1993 there were 3,00 applications for barring orders and 1,000 separation applications, in effect four thousand marriage breakdowns; more than a quarter the level of recorded marriages for that year (15,000)

Despite the ban on divorce marital breakdown is clearly as prevalent here as in other states. The decision of the Supreme court on July 14th last on the constitutionality of the Judicial Separation Act cleared the way for the holding of the referendum, which, if adopted, will allow the estimated 70,000 people in a legal limbo to regularise their affairs.

UN and Bosnia

The UN's credibility is at stake in Bosnia Herzogovina and its presence must be strengthened to maintain the safety of the civilian population, DL leader, Proinsias De Rossa has warned. In the short term the protection of civilians must be the UN's aim, but it is clear that a solution to the conflict will not be found through militarism or nationalism, but through respect for inviolability of borders and pre-eminence of human rights, he said.

"Unless such a process is engaged in we will continue witnessing a vicious cycle of violence threatening the Balkans and ultimately the security of the entire continent," he added.

He further called for examination of the possibility of Irish mediation on the conflict involving the Irish ambassador to the UN. This should be accompanied by acceptance in the EU of refugees from the region.

The major European powers cannot shirk their responsibilities arising from their premature recognition of the former Yugoslavia'a constituent states, which helped create the scenes of horror currently being witnessed. It is now incumbent on France and the UK in particular to ensure that any actions undertaken are in the context of the UN Security Council, rather than as unilateral initiatives. UN withdrawal from Bosnia would seriously compromise its ability to intervene in other future conflicts, Proinsias De Rossa said.

SERVICE CHARGES

DEMOCRATIC Left's three Concillors on Dublin South County Council have entered an agreement with Labour and Fine Gael, which may have the effect of eliminating service charges from next year.

The agreement involves establishement of a review procedure which will have the specific aim of eliminating the charge at next year's Estimates. Water rates will remain for next year but there will be on no increase.

The agreement includes further provisions including

* an increase in discretionary funding for development works in each electoral area
* a forum of various interest groups to recommend locations for future accommodation needs of travellers
* establishment of a new 'District and Community Partnership' on local renewal
* election of Cllr Don Tipping as Leas Chathaoirleach of the Council.

The agreement also excludes Fianna Fail from the driving seat in finalising the new County Development Plan, as they were the last time when the procedure became more like a property developers office.

Some media coverage misrepresented the Dublin South agreement on the issue of water rates, which was of necessity made at very short notice in the last week of June. Water rates are currently charged in every council except Limerick and Dublin Corporations. DL's attempts to seek their removal from the Estimates, have in most cases resulted in outright opposition from other parties, with usually no seconder where we have only one Councillor.

The Dublin South move may pave the way for an agreed elimination of the charges, and has won a commitment from other parties to investigating their removal. However, there still remains a need to specify more clearly a policy on the overall issue of local government funding, to fill the gap left by removal of the charges, how to obtain the necessary additional funding to place local government on a firm footing and restore adequate powers to local councils. Members suggestions are welcome. The party's NEC is undertaking a review of the issue.

***New Tinahely branch!** *Branch members Elizabeth Whelan, Mary Byrne, Coleen Kavanagh, Bridget Fox, Sheila Murphy, Christy Murphy, Gerry Walker, Deirdre Minogue and Jim Byrne photographed at the launch of the new branch, with Liz McManus, TD, John Gallagher, General Secretary, and Arklow and Avoca members.*

Expansion in Wicklow

DURING the recent Wicklow by-election, Democratic Left greatly strengthened its position organisationally in the constituency , particularly in the south of Wicklow which traditionally had been the weaker area numerically.

The first formal development has been the launch of a new branch in Tinahely, where members highlighted issues such as crime, housing, assistance for people starting their own business and improved dole payments for young unemployed as among their priority issues.

By-Election

The recent by-election campaign produced a large number of new volunteers for Democratic Left in Wicklow, which will greatly strengthen organisation in advance of the next general election. The poll itself produced a huge floating vote, in which over 40% of votes went to Independent candidates with all the main parties losing out on first preferences as a result.

While DL's vote dropped by the same percentage on that achieved by Liz McManus in 1992, the party most unhappy with the outcome will be Fianna Fail, who having recorded a record low in '92 saw their vote slip further this time, in a situation where they were contesting in Opposition and with a high campaign profile by new party leader, Bertie Ahern.

The result, however, does highlight a high degree of volatility among the electorate. While there was no feedback of hostility to the government during the campaign and while there was no particular incentive for voters to rush to elect four out of five government TDs in the constituency, the result does emphasise the need for DL to continue to highlight issues of concern and its own identity on various policy issues.

Bray UDC Chair

At its last meeting, Bray Urban District Council elected John McManus as chairperson for the coming year. The party currently has four members on the Council the others being Dermot Tobin, Ann Egan and Ann Ferris. Among John McManus' priorities will be development of the town centre for trading, increased community participation on issues such as housing and obtaining more land for industrial and employment development in the town.

A School's Council

Perhaps the most interesting initiative, however, is Cllr. McManus' proposal to launch a Junior Bray Council, comprised of students in transition year classes in Bray. It is intended that they will elect the same number of representatives as the UDC proper (12), and discuss issues which may then be referred to the UDC for consideration.

COISTE GAEILGE

Tá sé i gceist coiste Gaeilge a athbhunú. Bfhéidir go mbá cheart an Cumann Gaelach a athbhunú ag ocáid éigin freisin!.

Tá mórán ceisteanna tábhachtacha le plé i dtaobh na Gaeilge. Tóg réimse an oideachais mar shampla, bíonn stádus na Gaeilge conspóideach go minic. Tá Gaeilge bainteach le cursaí fostaíochta, féadfar mórán plé a dhéanamh ar an ról sin sna Gaeltachtaí. Buntáiste don Daonlathas Clé a bheadh ann dá mbeadh coiste againn a bhualadh le chéile go rialta chun smaointe éagsúla a phlé agus taighde a dheanamh ar na riachtánaisí atá ann maidir leis an ábhar seo. Ar abhair eile go bhfeadfaí díospóireacht a bheith ann mar gheall orthu, bheadh cursaí bainteach le meáncumarsáidí, an dátheangachas sa soichí agus ceisteanna i dtaobh an daonlathachas féin agus rialtas aitiúl.

Cad faoi cáipéis díospóireachta a chuir le chéile i dtaobh polasaí Gaeilge don Daonlathas Clé? Mas suim leat cursaí Gaeilge, féadfar téangmháil a dhéanamh le Fiachra O Ceilleachair ag an Ardoifig, tel. 8729700.

AROUND THE CONSTITUENCIES...

MUNSTER, CONNAUGHT-ULSTER.

The Waterford organisation witnesses two important milestones this year. Paddy Gallagher is in his 21st year on Waterford Corporation and Tony Wright is in his 10th year on Dungarvan UDC. Tony Wright is also a Waterford county councillor. Eamon Martin has recently been co-opted onto the party's NEC.

Since her famous by-election victory, Kathleen Lynch has been maximising her impact in Cork North Central through the operation of a full-time constituency office to compliment existing clinic arrangements. She is also a member of Cork Corporation, along with John Kelleher. Democratic Left continues to operate a weekly advice centre in the Cork South Central constituency.

Senator Joe Sherlock is busier than ever. Along with his full-time constituency office in Mallow, Joe is operating regular clinics in Carigtwohill, Cobh, Youghal, Middleton, Ballyclough, Buttevant, Ballyhea, Doneraile, Mitchelstown, Glanworth, Castletownroche, Fermoy, Conna and Watergrasshill.

John Ryan is continuing to add to his profile in the Limerick area. He is picking up issues through a regular canvass. He received widespread favourable publicity of late when he initiated moves to enable Limerick Corporation to take on drug pushers.

In Donegal, Cllr. Seamus Rodgers who was one of the members of the national task force on travellers which recently published its report.

LEINSTER

Following the intense canvass of the Wicklow constituency in the recent by-election, the party organisation is set to expand in the southern region of the county. Wicklow's only Minister, Liz McManus, recently launched the Tinahealy branch. Arklow is soon set to become Wicklow's eight branch. Democratic Left now holds the chair of Bray UDC, on which it has four councillors.

Catherine Murphy will be contesting a new constituency in the next general election. The three seater of Kildare North is based on the urban sections of the county, with Leixlip as the biggest town. In addition to canvassing, Catherine is conducting clinics in Leixlip, Maynooth. Celbridge, Kilcock, Clane and Naas.

Michael Enright and his colleagues in the Wexford branch are pleased to welcome the New Ross branch to their constituency council. A major expansion for the organisation in Wexford, New Ross is the first branch of the DL to be founded since our entry into Government.

DUBLIN

Marine Junior Minister Eamon Gilmore is operating an extensive advice centre network in the Dun Laoighaire constituency. He is being assisted in his work by Cllr. Denis O Callaghan and the new councillor, Paddy Fitzgerald.

Jim Allen's constituency of Dublin South East was affected by the boundary changes, some votes transferring to South Central. Jim Allen runs weekly advice centres and is very active as a party representative in the area.

Proinsias De Rossa's constituency of Dublin North West gained some of Dublin Central in the constituency changes. Finglas members recently launched a development plan for the Finglas region.

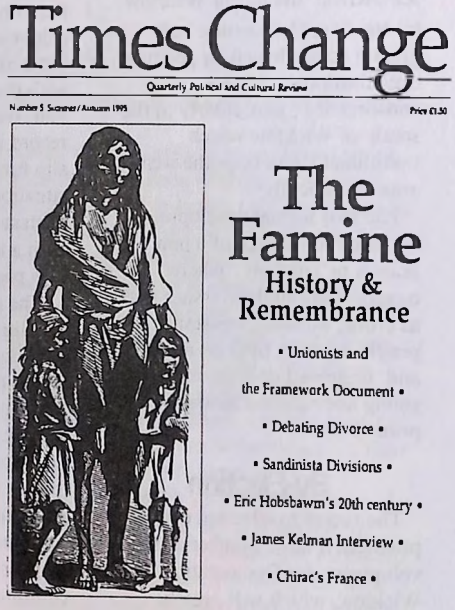
NORTHERN IRELAND AND OTHER AREAS

Democratic Left have one elected representative in Northern Ireland. He is Gerry Cullen, who is on Dungannon District Council in the Fermanagh-South Tyrone constituency. Other party representatives are currently helping to contribute to the work of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

The Democratic Left also draws membership from the Belfast North, Belfast South, Belfast West, Antrim South, Mid Ulster and South Down constituencies.

Democratic Left has a branch based in Brussels and has members based in Britain.

Following the recent resignation of Fiachra O'Ceilleachair as chairperson, Democratic Left Youth elected Justin Evers as the new chairperson.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Lift Arms Embargo on Bosnia?

No, *says Frans Frisson of Dun Laoghaire Constituency*

The efforts of the UN to contain civil war in Bosnia, and to bring in to a peaceful end have not been helped by the partisan attitudes of the powers who wanted Yugoslavia broken up at all costs. The Bosnian people are paying the price.

We are treated to an orchestrated media-war - as in the Gulf - in which the culprit was made known in advance. "The French and US Governments have successfully galvanised their publics to the urgency of responding to the Bosnian Crisis" (Irish Times 22. 07. 95)

It is difficult to expect an easy path to peace, when some of the main movers are obviously biased.

I have no intention of condoning any of the atrocities committed by the Serb side, but I am uncomfortable with the ease by which the deeds of other sides are patched over. I doubt the purity of the motives of Clinton, Chirac and Kohl. I refuse to let my judgement be dictated by reporters, filmcrews, and media bosses. When emotion takes over reason is lost.

Those who call for 'action' should pause to think: Muslim Governments are rattling the sabres, most of the Balkan countries and Russia have a very different view of the conflict than is required of us. Do we really want the conflict to escalate?

I firmly believe that the peace initiatives of the UN must be resumed and carried through to the bitter end, in a non-partisan manner, and with no allowance for nonsense from any side, including Mr. Chirac, who is anxious to build himself an image as a hawkish remake of General de Gaulle.

As a socialist, I refuse to take the easy solution of blindly following the pack.

Pointing to the Berlusconi phenomenon, the Irish Times (26.7.95) titles "Press has power to construct our versions of (social) reality." Don't let the media create YOUR reality, THINK!

Yes, *says Pol O Gradaigh, UCD Branch*

There is one useful historical parallel with what is currently happening in Bosnia. In 1936 Fascist forces attacked the Democratic government of Spain and instead of supporting the Democrats, Western powers imposed an arms embargo. Nobody on the left supported the arms embargo. The result was that the democratic side as it grew weaker was taken over by undemocratic elements and eventually the Fascists triumphed.

That is what is now happening in Bosnia. Now that the UN is clearly not going to commit more ground forces to save the government-held enclaves the last justification for maintaining the arms embargo has been removed. It is time to take sides with the democrats and the Left in Bosnia. If we do not, the most poignant victims of the war will be those Bosnians,- Serb, Croat and Muslims, - who have supported democracy and hoped that democrats elsewhere would support them. They will have been the most gravely betrayed if the West brings about a settlement creating three ethnically exclusive and authoritarian states in Bosnia.

The central fact of the war in Bosnia is genocide. Ethnic cleansing has been an intrinsic part of the Bosnian Serb strategy. It would be ludicrous to claim that as socialists our first priority should be the ceasefire in Bosnia never mind the circumstances. Our first priority should be the civilian people, the victims of genocide. If military action to defend Srebrencia would have been justified to allow the civilian population to remain in their homes, it seems hard to deny that military action would be justified to retake Srebrencia and let them back. It would be a strange socialist who would claim that being the victim of ethnic cleansing is enough to lose the right to your home.

Neither is a policy of merely letting the UN defend the safe areas adequate. The towns of Srebrencia, Zepa and Gorazde each had a population of a few thousand before the war, which has since swollen to tens of thousands of refugees. Creating ghettoes has never before been a way of defending human rights or opposing genocide. We should not delude ourselves into thinking that this time it is.

VACANCIES

A small number of vacancies may arise shortly in Proinsias de Rossa's office. The duration of the employment will be for the lifetime of the government.

The work will require ability and experience in policy areas, research, communication, and computer literacy. Wage scales will vary but will be related to civil service scales.

Persons interested should submit a c.v. immediately for the personal attention of John Gallagher, Democratic Left, 69 Middle Abbey St, Dublin 1.

ALTERNATIVE BASTILLE DAY CELEBRATION

Instead of attending the French embassy's official Bastille Day celebrations, Democratic Left leader Proinsias De Rossa hosted an alternative event on July 14th last.Earlier in the week, Proinsias De Rossa had turned down an invitation to go to the French embassy, making clear his opposition to the French Government's resumed nuclear testing.

A large number of party members and supporters joined representatives of organisations such as Pax Christi and CND for the reception in Buswells Hotel. Politicians from other political parties were in attendance, including the Chairperson of the Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs, Alan Dukes. The Australian ambassador, Edward J. Stephens, was also present.

The reception was addressed by John De Courcy Ireland, the eminent marine expert and President of Irish CND. Junior Environment Minister Liz McManus also spoke, in addition to DL Executive member and French citizen, Sylvie Batt. Setting the significance of Bastille Day in context, Proinsias De Rossa said it was appropriate to commemorate it because it was not just a French national celebration but a "milestone in Europe's progress towards democracy." He said it was regrettable that "the country which 200 years ago gave the world the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen should now be launching a wholesale assault on the rights of French Polynesians and others in the South Pacific to a nuclear free environment."

In conclusion, Proinsias De Rossa reiterated Democratic Left's commitment to work for a wholesale ban on the development, production, testing and sale of all nuclear weapons, as well as the destruction of existing weapons. "I hope that today's event organised by Democratic Left, together with similar protests around the world, will bring home to the French Government the outrage felt across the world at their stance" he remarked.

'FORUM',
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Dublin 1.
Tel:01 8729550 Fax: 8729238.

Post Leaving Courses

A study on needs and requirements in Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses will shortly be carried out for the party by Justin Evers. Those interesed in the area and wishing to contribute ideas or work on the project may contact him in writing c/o Head Office or at his home number 01.4549770.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE 1996

Are you interested in keepung up to date with developments concerning the upcoming IGC and perhaps contributing to party policy on the issues raised?

DL Brussels Branch, produces a weekly digest of IGC coverage - press, special journals and databases - normally 10 - 15 A4 pages which it would be happy to fax directly to anybody who is interested. If you would like a copy give your fax number to Cathy Flanagan in Head Office or fax it to Jim O'Donnell at 003222308088.

Anyone for College?

THIRD level colleges resume in September and November. The party's student section are currently organising Freshers' meetings for that period.

We need to know:

* names of party members and supporters who are beginning third level education this year and who could be contacted re arrangements for Freshers' meetings
* names of members and supporters working in third level colleges who may be able to similarly help out
* suggestions from branches and members in third level colleges areas regarding recruitment and activity in the student area.

Information to Head Office, as soon as possible please.

AUTUMN SCHOOL

THE party will hold an ***'Autumn School'*** in mid-October in Dublin on the broad theme of developing an anti-poverty strategy. A Planning group will be working on speakers and the agenda in the near future. Members who wish to become involved in this work should contact Triona Dooney c/o Head Office.

Your View!

READERS views are welcome for 'Forum' on any topic. Please submit letters, articles, notices, etc to Head Office before the end of August for the September issue.